

VZCZCXRO4398
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #1610/01 1341356
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 141356Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8039
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4067
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3624

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001610

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2017

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SUBJECT: NDS SALEH ON PAKISTAN, THE TALIBAN, AND AFGHAN
SECURITY

Classified By: Political-Military Counselor Carol Rodley, for reasons 1
.4 b, d.

¶1. (C) Summary: In a May 8 meeting with Counselor Eliot Cohen, National Director of Security Amarullah Saleh analyzed the nature of the Taliban and its links to Pakistan. He said that despite repeated attempts to share information with the Pakistanis, they have not been responsive to his initiatives. Saleh argued that the GOA, responding to international pressure, has often moved too quickly to build institutions and has not sufficiently used traditional sources of support from Afghan tribal elements. He said that while the Coalition enjoys massive legitimacy, it is now time for Afghan security to be handed over to Afghans wherever possible. Mentoring and capacity building of Afghan institutions is critically important, particularly the Ministry of Interior. Saleh emphasized that he has no anti-Pakistan agenda, but that much depends on Pakistan's willingness to truly support the Afghan government in this early, critical period. End summary.

¶2. (C) National Director of Security Amarullah Saleh began the discussion with a short tour d'horizon of the Afghan security situation. In the north and northeast, in an arc from Faryab to Badakhshan, there is no real insurgency, he said. Some elements there are affiliated with insurgents, but many have been arrested. In the northwest, particularly Baghdis, there are security problems but they are not big enough to stop reconstruction. In the west, the only Herati district with problems is Shindand; Farah is "manageable." Central Afghanistan is "completely stable." Parwan and Kapisa have pockets of problems. There are occasional difficulties in the east, particularly in Kunar, where the Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) has some influence, and where a few areas in Laghman are problematical. In the southeast, there are pockets of problems along the Pakistan border. Kandahar, which was largely unstable last year, has stabilized. Whereas last year there were

approximately 25 deaths every day in Kandahar, that number is now 1-2 per day. In Zabol "we are weak, which makes the enemy seem strong although it is not." Helmand and Uruzgan are now the main challenges. In these two provinces the Taliban are creating parallel governments in remote areas.

Taliban and the Role of Pakistan

¶3. (C) Saleh emphasized that in his view the Taliban command structure and training centers are not in Afghanistan. In late 2001-2002, the Taliban were not defeated, he said. Rather, they just moved over the border to Pakistan. "So from the beginning the campaign was incomplete." In his view the current regrouping is flat, not hierarchical. For example, in Uruzgan the Taliban are divided into 60 small groups. Each goes back to Pakistan independently for instructions. This allows the higher leadership to avoid the situation where killing one commander would incapacitate the entire structure. Saleh stressed that an insurgent group with a safehaven and support structure outside the country will never die, and therefore something must be done to deal with the command structure and recruitment that is going on in Pakistan.

¶4. (C) Counselor Cohen asked whether Saleh had shared this view with his Pakistani counterparts. He said that he had, but that "they have not responded well." He said there is "episodic cooperation," but nothing consistent. "We send a dossier and don't hear back for

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weeks." He said that while they were in Turkey the Pakistani Ambassador to Afghanistan offered to serve as a conduit of information between NDS and ISI, but when Saleh passed him the confession of an arrested attempted suicide bomber with the offer that the Pakistani DCM or others from the Pakistan Embassy could interview the detainee privately with their own interpreters, he never heard back. He said that was an example of the lack of political will on the part of Pakistan to really address the Taliban problem.

¶5. (C) In response to the question of what is motivating the Taliban, Saleh said that the political ideology stems from a group of religious extremists based in Karachi, Pakistan. The groups in the Tribal Areas and Waziristan are the "militant wing," but the political leadership is in Karachi, where it enjoys massive sympathy from the Arab world as well as Pakistanis. In Saleh's view, for Pakistan's leadership this support outweighs the benefits in trade and commerce that Pakistan could get from a stable, prosperous Afghanistan.

Improving the Security Situation

¶6. (C) Saleh said that the only way to solve the impasse with Pakistan is to strengthen Afghanistan's internal security. Right now the borders are open and the police are powerless. "As long as we speak from a position of weakness, they will not respect us," he said.

¶7. (C) Both conventional and unconventional forces are needed, according to Saleh. "We need the border tribes to create a wall of flesh to protect us," he commented, referring to the traditional tribal levies that were used by previous governments in Afghanistan. Although the tribes have offered, the GOA has rejected them "because it is not the modern way," he complained. Thus, he said, we are not incorporating

the strengths and possibilities of the tribes. He noted that the Pakistanis do use their tribes, through the malik system which provides a token stipend and honorary title to tribal leaders who enforce the law. But since the Western countries active in Afghanistan view the use of tribal networks as a "resubmergence into militia culture," the GOA agreed not to make use of them. For example in Helmand, he argued, the "good leaders" were removed because they didn't have paper credentials such as a university degree. As a result the Taliban took over. The British tried to create new local leadership in Musa Qala, but failed. Thus in Helmand we have a purely institutional approach, he said. We clear an area but cannot create political context because all the available leaders have been disqualified according to institutional standards. (Comment: We disagree. The previous Helmand leadership (governor and police chief) were corrupt, divisive, incompetent, and involved in drug trafficking. Supporting them would not have been good for Helmand or the country. End comment.)

¶8. (C) Saleh asserted that Afghanistan is a strong nation. It will not fragment along ethnic or linguistic lines. The U.S. enjoys massive legitimacy in the country. The GOA and Coalition are not buying support, Afghans are giving it willingly. Indeed, this is the first time in Afghan history that power has been centralized without violence. That is an enormous achievement. However, that legitimacy does not always lead to political strength. For it to do so, Afghan security needs to be handed over to Afghans. Routine operations should be transferred even if casualty rates rise. The GOA will continue to

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call on its international partners for macro support, but wherever possible Afghans should identify the enemy and do the fighting themselves. It is also important to keep a balance of mentor assistance, he said. Too few mentors, as at the Justice Ministry, and capacity cannot be developed; too many mentors, and the Afghans are sidelined. He remarked that reform of the Ministry of Interior is key. The MOI is the face of today's Afghanistan, and "it's a mess right now." He urged more training programs and capacity building for MOI personnel.

¶9. (C) Saleh commented that all parties in Afghanistan recognize that international help is needed to build the Afghan economy. "There is no arrogance of oil here," he said.

¶10. (C) When asked what his message to Secretary Rice would be, Saleh said that he has no anti-Pakistan agenda. That would not lead anywhere, he argued. Although Afghanistan will not collapse as a nation, its political system can partially or wholly fail if we do not resolve the situation that affects both sides of the border. He said that the Afghan people want Pakistan to help modernize Afghanistan, and if they do their actions will be remembered with gratitude. But if they try to stifle the GOA in its infancy, that too will be remembered and will remain in the Afghan psyche forever.

Comment

¶11. (C) Saleh's presentation was, as always, thoughtful and articulate. As head of the Security Directorate, he naturally favors stability over other factors in the complex Afghan political landscape. On this and other occasions he has argued that local powerbrokers should be supported even though their record shows them to be in league with criminal and

narcotics elements. Similarly, in support of short-term stability he champions the concept of "governor,s militias," which most observers believe would seriously undermine the authority of the central government. His views therefore need to be balanced against the goal of building a viable democracy in Afghanistan in accordance with the rule of law. That said, many of Saleh,s thoughts are well worth consideration. In particular, his suggestion that we need to act quickly to capitalize on present legitimacy by increasingly handing over responsibility for security to Afghan forces is particularly relevant given the present controversy over civilian casualties. While Saleh,s suspicion of Pakistan,s intentions reflects the view of a broad cross-section of Afghan society, his offer to work cooperatively with the Pakistanis is a positive sign.

112. (U) The Counselor,s delegation has cleared this cable.
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